

Dear Senator Bond:

Thank you for the statement filed for the record of the Mississippi River Commission public meeting in Caruthersville, Missouri, on April 2, 2001. In your statement you discussed the St. Johns-New Madrid Floodway, Missouri, project; sufficient funding for the maintenance of inland ports in Missouri; monitoring of the ongoing river ferries at Ste. Genevieve and Dorena by the Corps; and the Upper Mississippi River Navigation Study.

On April 11, 2001, the Memphis District team met with representatives from St. Johns Levee and Drainage District, Missouri Department of Conservation, Environmental Protection Agency Region VII, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to discuss the scope of a revised Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the St. Johns Bayou and New Madrid Floodway project. The revised SEIS will include analysis of different New Madrid levee closure locations and a more detailed discussion of potential mitigation sites. Evaluation of levee closure alternatives has been initiated. The revised draft SEIS is scheduled to be completed in October of this year.

The Commission shares your views on the importance of inland ports and their economic contribution to the local communities they serve and the nation as a whole. As you are aware, the President's budget request for Fiscal Year 2002 does not include funding for maintenance dredging of the New Madrid County Harbor or the Pemiscot County Harbor, as well as many others shallow-draft harbors across the nation.

The Commission agrees with you that safe and dependable transportation should be provided by ferries across the river to include the Dorena and Ste. Genevieve ferries. Unfortunately, the Corps has no authorization to monitor ferry operations to ensure that such transportation is provided.

The Corps of Engineers is reviewing the National Research Council's (NRC) March 2001 report on the Upper Mississippi River Navigation Study. The Secretary of the Army requested the NRC review. The Corps of Engineers and the newly established National Federal Senior Principals Task Force will consider the NRC report in revising the Project Study Plan (PSP) that will set the course to complete this complex System Feasibility Study. This revised PSP is scheduled for Corps of Engineers approval in June 2001. The PSP will establish a revised study schedule and cost estimate.

The National Federal Senior Principals Task Force was established by the Corps of Engineers with the purpose of providing national-level balance and guidance on important economic and environmental issues to assist in bringing this study to completion. Membership includes: Department of Agriculture (Transportation and Marketing Programs); Department of Interior (Fish and Wildlife Service); Environmental Protection Agency (Office of Wetlands, Oceans and Watersheds); Department of Transportation (Maritime Administration); and Corps of Engineers (Planning and Policy Division). This group has met three times during March and April 2001 and will continue to be engaged throughout the study process. A regional group has also been convened from the staff of these agencies to provide multi-agency oversight and guidance to the study and provide input to the Principals Task Force process. The Regional Interagency Work Group met on April 12, 2001. In the future, interest groups will be invited to selected meetings of the regional group to provide specific input to facilitate discussion, understanding, and resolution of issues.

Thank you again for submittal of your comments for our meeting and for your continued interest in the work of the Corps of Engineers. The Commission appreciates receiving your views and will be pleased to hear from you at our future hearings.

Sincerely,

Edwin J. Arnold, Jr.
Brigadier General, U.S. Army
President Designee, Mississippi
River Commission